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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 002408

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SUBJECT: AMLO: FOREIGN POLICY STAYS THE SAME BUT CAMPAIGN
STRATEGY TO CHANGE

REF: MEXICO 1461

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR LESLIE A. BASSETT, REASONS:
1.4(B/D).

Summary

¶1. (C) On Tuesday 05/02, leftist candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) chaired a foreign policy program hosted by the Consulting Council for an Alternative Project for the Nation. The Council is led by former Mexican Ambassador to the United Nations and AMLO advisor Porfirio Munoz Ledo and was created as AMLO and the Democratic Revolutionary Party's (PRD) principal campaign strategy/policy development group. AMLO used the opportunity to reiterate to the audience his six main foreign policy objectives. The presentation was one of his first thematic events since recent polls showed him in a statistical tie or behind conservative candidate Felipe Calderon. According to two separate advisors close to the campaign, the event also signified a shift in AMLO's campaign strategy - an attempt to refocus certain themes to a broader audience. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On May 2 the Consulting Council for an Alternative Project for the Nation hosted a foreign policy program titled "Dignity of the Republic." The program, consisting of a round table of foreign policy experts, was chaired by AMLO and included presentations analyzing Mexico's foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America, and globalization. Experts also suggested a number of important changes the next president would need to make in order to raise Mexico's profile in the region and globally, which included stronger relationships with Latin American neighbors, consistent and focused defense of migrant rights, and better cooperation on transnational crimes and terrorism.

¶3. (U) AMLO used the event to reiterate his six main foreign policy objectives. There were no significant changes to AMLO's policy, as initially described during a campaign event in Ciudad Juarez in March (reftel), and it was clear the issue was not one of his top priorities. Once again, AMLO discussed a policy that would be consistent with the objectives set out by the Mexican constitution and spoke of a diplomacy reflective of domestic policies, saying that Mexico cannot possibly discuss security or human rights abroad if both were not appropriately addressed domestically. He described a "measured and prudent" diplomacy where Mexico would not assume the lead and where the country would only participate in solutions to global threats within international organizations - never unilaterally. He expressed his desire for further economic and commercial integration with Latin America and the Caribbean. Most fundamental of all, stated AMLO, is Mexico's bilateral relationship with the United States - one he hopes will be of mutual respect and collaboration. AMLO made it clear the U.S.-Mexico relationship would be his most important objective, declaring to the audience that he will seek ways

to better manage cooperation, to work together to "organize" the migration phenomenon (which he considers the most important bilateral issue), and to do more to protect the human rights of migrants looking for work and to protect the rights of those migrants already in the U.S. Sticking to the immigration theme a bit longer, AMLO also stated that his economic development proposals would serve as the necessary leverage to convince the U.S. of the need for an immigration accord.

Time to Refocus

14. (C) The foreign policy presentation came on the heels of three public polls showing AMLO's lead slipping or gone. No longer holding his usual commanding lead, AMLO has challenged the polls' legitimacy - going so far as to say that President Fox's office was manipulating the results before and after the first presidential debate April 25 (reftel). Speculation has run rampant that the latest poll results will force AMLO to change his campaign strategy or risk falling farther behind. Although he has publicly denied a change in strategy is necessary, two close campaign advisors told us differently. According to Javier Quijano, coordinator of a small group of trusted advisors, the strategy is in flux, which is not a bad thing. Quijano would not confirm AMLO's recent statements that his internal polling shows him 10 percentage points ahead but stated that the most recent Mitofsky poll and PRD polls showed a more favorable situation. He felt optimistic that things will play out much better in May, and said that the campaign was already organizing another poll that would reach out to over thirty thousand registered voters instead of the approximately two thousand used in the other polls. The situation did not appear as optimistic to Juan Jose Garcia Ochoa, PRD federal

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deputy and spokesperson for Marcelo Ebrard (PRD candidate for Mexico City mayor). Garcia Ochoa believes the recent polls are semi-accurate and that a change in strategy has already begun - starting with this program. He said AMLO will shift his focus to the middle class and young voters. When Poloff asked how that was possible when AMLO's campaign slogan is "first the poor", Garcia Ochoa explained that AMLO would focus on the themes that mattered most to these groups: security, immigration, trade, and employment. Both agreed the July 2 vote would be close if things do not turn around over the next two months but remained enthusiastically positive that AMLO would come out on top.

Comment - Other Campaign Notes

15. (C) If Tuesday's program was the start of AMLO's new strategy than he may be in more trouble than previously thought. As in his earlier appearances, AMLO seemed disinterested or lost in the foreign policy discussion. If he hopes to gain ground on National Action Party (PAN) candidate Calderon in areas like security and employment he will have to do it with the same enthusiasm and energy he shows when addressing the mostly older and poor audiences that receive him on campaign events. Focusing on his foreign policy, AMLO still believes he can negotiate a migration agreement with the U.S. if he improves economic development and job creation in Mexico. Embassy efforts to explain to his advisors the complexities of this issue have either gone unheard or have been disregarded. Either way, if it continues to be a main theme in AMLO's foreign policy as president it will not only create a difficult start to our bilateral relationship, it also may be his first failed campaign promise.

16. (C) As election day nears, rumors abound as to who will fill the candidates' cabinets. Although AMLO stated earlier in the campaign that Dr. Jose Maria Perez Gay would be his Foreign Secretary, the press and other analysts believe the position may be up for grabs - citing Porfirio Munoz Ledo's continued efforts to control all policy making

responsibilities as a sign of his interest in the position. According to Garcia Ochoa, Munoz Ledo has no chance of becoming AMLO's Foreign Secretary because he is too active and outspoken, the opposite of what AMLO wants in that position. Garcia Ochoa explained that Perez Gay is exactly the type of personality AMLO wants, someone who can follow orders and not act in opposition to the president. Garcia Ochoa believes Munoz Ledo would be better fit for, and most likely is aiming at, Secretary of Governance. Garcia Ochoa admitted that the list of aspirants for that position was even longer than the one for congressional seats. End Comment.

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